(c) the areas identified by India for helping Afghanistan in its rehabilitation and the nature of assistance proposed to be provided by India for the purpose?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI RAO INDERJIT SINGH): (a) to (c) President Karzai of Afghanistan visited India from 23-25 February 2005. He called on the President and held delegation level talks with the Prime Minister. In the discussions, the two sides reviewed bilateral relations including India's assistance to Afghanistan's reconstruction effort. India has committed US $ 500 million over the period 2002-2008 for the reconstruction effort in Afghanistan. India has undertaken, in partnership with the Afghan government, projects in a wide range of sectors, including power, road construction, agriculture, industry, telecommunications, information & broadcasting, health and education.

Strengthening of Maoist in Nepal

†2526. SHRI RAJ MOHINDER SINGH MAJITHA:
SHRI RAM JETHMALANI:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that recently USA has also taken note of the reality that Maoist terrorists in Nepal are constantly gaining strength;

(b) if so, the facts in this regard;

(c) whether it is a fact that the situation developed from gaining strength constantly by the terrorists in the neighbouring country is a matter of concern to India also; and

(d) if so, Government's reaction thereto and the fresh steps taken so far?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI RAO INDERJIT SINGH): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. The US Government has shared with us its concern at the growth of the Maoist insurgency in Nepal.

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

(c) and (d) Government of India is aware of and concerned about the implications of the growth of Maoist insurgency in Nepal becuase of the open border and the links between Nepal's Maoists and Left Wing Extremist and other groups in India. The Maoist insurgency in Nepal has also fuelled migration of Nepalese into our border States. Government of India has taken steps to strengthen security in border areas and the Sashstra Seema Bal has intensified its patrolling along the India-Nepal Border.

Double entry of Passports Enroute Agartala and Kolkata through Bangladesh

2527. SHRI MATILAL SARKAR : Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Government are aware that the present double entry system of passports for the passengers plying between Agartala and Kolkata through Bangladesh is causing unusually long time for completion of the journey;

(b) whether Government are contemplating any proposal for direct journey between Agartala and Kolkata through Bangladesh without any break in the journey and change of vehicles,

(c) whether Government have worked out that the time of journey may be lessened by five to six hours that way; and

(d) the steps to be initiated by the Government?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI RAO INDERJIT SINGH): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) The Kolkata-Dhaka bus service has been operational since June 1999 while the Agartala-Dhaka bus service started in September 2003. Government of India is currently examining a proposal to start a direct bus service between Agartala and Kolkata *via* Dhaka.

(c) No formal study has been done by the Government of India as yet. However it is expected that the journey time would be reduced.

(d) The matter has not yet been taken up with the Government of Bangladesh.